LIMERICK SURVEY

Stebbins Lists Findings

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SO limericks are corny?

Ask that question of any group of "sophisticated" advertising people, and you're sure of a positive answer at least eight times out of 10. That goes for everybody in the business. It includes media men, advertising agency people, advertising managers, and even more frequently, executives of firms who advertise.

But what does the *consumer* actually think about limericks?

That's what we wondered when we started using limericks in the commercials for Signal Oil Co. during its broadcasts of *The Whistler* on CBS Pacific stations (*The Whistler*, having been on the CBS Pacific Coast network continuously for the past six or seven years, attained highest popularity of any PC program over a longer period of time than any other program in PC radio history—with Hooperatings in excess of 20, which ain't hay even for programs with a big TC talent budget).

So we were not surprised when many of our friends started to kid us about stooping to anything as low, undignified, "corny" as limericks on such a big league show.

Oil Buying Considered

It's the feeling of our agency, based on consumer research, that the public does not consider the choice of gasoline as serious a purchase as they do the selection of a particular brand of lubricating oil. Whereas they may drive a mile or two for their favorite brand of oil, only the most technically-minded motorists seem to worry about getting home safely if they stop to fill up with any well known brand of gasoline.

Therefore, why should we take the *presentation* of our advertising copy story too seriously? (Note I say *presentation*—because we do stick to good reason-why appeals in the copy itself.)

With this strategy in mind, we first switched the outdoor advertising from pictorial travel copy to a cartoon presentation of our so-called slogan "Go Farther with Signal," which has been used consistently for 15 years.

The cartoons, which were executed by Tony Barlow of New York, pictured in a humorous way a series of predicaments in which motorists have found themselves after running out of gasoline, the caption being: "Next Time Go Farther with Signal."

Consumer readership checks showed that this cartoon presentation had far more than average identification and remembrance value.

Based upon this consumer reaction, we started using limericks on our radio program to dramatize similar predicaments — for example:

There once was a driver named Shuster
Who's getting more miles than he uster.
Since Signal he's tried,
His car is his pride—
And Shuster's a Signal Gas booster!

A skeptical fellow named Star
Tried out every gas in his car.
On business or pleasure
His mileage he'd measure,
And found Signal better by far!

Soon listeners started sending in limericks on their own, so we offered a $20 coupon book for every one that was used on the air. Naturally this sky-rocketed the submission of limericks. Over a period of several months, more than 10,000 were received from the six Signal states: California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nevada and Arizona.

Month by month the "needling" by our friends for being so corny drove us to make a survey of the public's reaction. The services of an independent research organization were engaged to telephone families identified as *Whistler* listeners through our regular coincidental research operations.

We gave these *Whistler* fans two chances to indicate their reaction to the advertising techniques.

The first question was: "Is there anything you particularly like or dislike about the advertising part of the program?" Results showed that only 1.2% registered a negative response. Of the respondents, 78.4% volunteered complimentary remarks about the advertising.

To make doubly sure we were getting all possible unfavorable reactions, even to the extent of reminding them of the feature we were most concerned about, a second question was asked: "You may have noticed that one of the commercials includes a limerick which has been sent in by some listener. How does this appeal to you?" Only 1.9% registered a negative response.

As a matter of fact, response to questions about advertising was more favorable than response to questions about the entertainment part of the program. On such a high-rating show, if people find less to criticize about the advertising than they do about the entertainment, isn't that something?

In addition, research showed that sponsor identification—which after all is one of the all-important elements in successful broadcasting—increased by 38% in a few months' time.

So who should worry whether or not sophisticated advertisers think limericks are corny? I can assure you Signal Oil Co. executives are more concerned with the public's reaction. After all, they're the people whose patronage makes the client's advertising possible.

P. S.—What about singing commercials? The so-called experts told us they would destroy the mood of our dramatic program, but we used short musical identification plugs in the opening of the show, immediately following the limerick, and at the close of the program. A survey on this point showed that only 1.9% had any unfavorable reaction.

AS president of Barton A. Stebbins Advertising Agency, Mr. Stebbins is regarded as one of the country's leading advertising men. Among the accounts his firm handles are: Southern California Nash Dealers Assn., Puffins Biscuits, Flying Tigers Inc., Glamour Products Co., Palmer Institute of Authorship and Signal Oil Co.

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